

The SOC

Scotland's Bird Club



COUNCIL MEETING 86/01 13th March 2022 Minutes

*SOC Scottish Charity Number: SC 009859
A Scottish Charitable Incorporated Organisation*

Session 86/01 of Council was held at 10:00 hrs on the 13th March 2022 using Zoom virtual conferencing software.

Present: Jeremy Wilson (Vice President and Chair), Lesley Creamer (Vice President) until 12.35pm, Richard Kerr (Hon Treasurer), Richard Leslie, Zul Bhatia, Will Cresswell, Elizabeth Irwin, Alan Knox, Jeremy Brock, Richard Somers Cocks, Neil Stratton, Rachael Wilbourn, Chris Wernham, Hannah Lemon, Pete Gordon.

In Attendance: Ruth Briggs (for Item 2), Kyle Hamilton (for Item 3).

		Action
1	<p>Apologies for absence</p> <p>In the absence of a President, Vice President Jeremy Wilson took the Chair. Apologies had been received from Wendy Hicks, David Rackham, David Lindgren. In the absence of the Secretary, Rachael Wilbourn took the minutes.</p>	
2	<p>Co-option of new SOC President</p> <p>The Appointments Panel recommended Ruth Briggs as a candidate for SOC President. The overall response was positive, and all council members were in favour of the new appointment. It was agreed to elect Ruth as a Temporary Trustee until formal appointment at the next AGM.</p> <p>Ruth was admitted to the meeting at this point. Council members introduced themselves and RB shared her experiences and the many roles she has held in nature & conservation. She also wished to acknowledge the work of her predecessor, Ian Bainbridge.</p> <p>JW thanked the Appointments Panel for their efforts in finding a suitable candidate for the role of President.</p>	
3	<p>Brewin Dolphin investment strategy</p> <p>The Hon Treasurer introduced Kyle Hamilton, a portfolio manager of Brewin Dolphin, to the meeting to present the SOC's investment strategy. The Club's portfolio is currently being managed around a risk category of 6 (categories range from 3-8), based on the makeup of the asset allocation of the portfolio. In summary, the higher the risk category, the higher the return but also the higher the volatility of the investment.</p> <p>To date, the Club's current asset value stands at £524k (after withdrawal of £12k). At the end Dec 2021, the value was +11.5% but has since been hit by concerns over inflation rates and Ukraine. There is a support</p>	<p>Presentation slides to be made available to council (password SCOTT0417).</p> <p>Strategy Group to consider how investment</p>

	<p>mechanism in place for the portfolio to provide protection when markets are weaker.</p> <p>Kyle identified some risks to the investment portfolio which included geopolitical events (e.g. Russia/Ukraine) and increases in inflation rates from supply issues (COVID recovery/Russian supply chain). Because of this, stock markets are currently uncertain for the long term but in the short term, growth is expected to be positive but lower than previous years.</p> <p>Asset allocation is based on an ESG (ethical, social and governance) criteria which are equally weighted when selecting the funds, but BD has an additional focus on ethical criteria. There was a question whether we are compromising our investment by investing ethically with a risk level of 6. KH reiterated that there is no trade off within BD in terms of ethics and investment return.</p> <p>There was a question about fees. Current fees are 0.8% but there are no charges on trades; SOC pays for this quarterly, which comes off the cash deposits within the portfolio.</p> <p>It was also realised that around 6% of the portfolio is exposed to Russia indirectly through the emerging markets fund. However, this does not pose a reputation risk to the Club.</p> <p>[Kyle left the meeting after being thanked for his presentation by the Chair]</p>	<p>managed moving forward.</p>
<p>4</p> <p>Minutes of Council Meeting 85/04 held on 5th December 2021</p>	<p>The minutes for the meeting on 5th December 2021 were corrected and approved, subject to some rewording in item 6.</p>	<p>RW/JW to complete corrections to minute of December meeting and send to Hon Secretary on his return.</p> <p>Draft minutes to be circulated to Council in good time ahead of next meeting for comment.</p>
<p>5</p> <p>Finance committee report</p>	<p>New subscription rates were proposed and discussed, with the addition of a new digital membership. It was confirmed in 10.2 of the Constitution, that rates should be approved by council and not ratified at an AGM.</p> <p>There was some debate around how the increased rates, particularly a £6 increase in Adult membership, combined with increased living costs since the Ukraine crisis would impact Club membership. However, the Hon Treasurer noted that the Club is also being affected by increased supply costs so finding a balance is vital.</p> <p>A poll was sent to a selection of members which suggested that 35% of participants would switch to a digital option, while 50% would not. Having a digital option was projected to bring in revenues of £11k, as well as a saving of £8k in printing/ mailing expenses. However, the actual cost differences were not available at the time of the poll and ZB noted that</p>	<p>Subscription categories consistencies to be checked across the constitution, website and SB.</p> <p>Junior membership to become a single joining fee of £5 until 18yrs old.</p> <p>Lower value membership</p>

	<p>seeing the level of discount available may have influenced the vote. The Chair questioned the flat rate increase across all categories but was reassured that the (minimum) level of discount applied was in line with other organisations.</p> <p>It was also proposed to make the digital subscription for the Junior, Student and Unwaged categories free, which might attract more members. Council was uneasy about free membership and suggested a single joining fee of £5 for Juniors then free digital version until 18 yrs old, and that lower value memberships should be digital only.</p> <p>EI made the point that some members in the Unwaged category may not necessarily have access to digital infrastructure and suggested retaining a print rate for that category.</p> <p>It was noted that the difference between the Junior and Student categories are not clear on the website and age groups need to be clarified. It was also suggested to change “Student” to “in full-time education” to be more clear, but this would require a change to the Constitution.</p> <p>Council suggested that the Finance Committee consider reviewing the subscription rates annually by taking into account trends in membership. This may cause significant administrative overhead, which needs to be evaluated, although it was noted that an annual review of subscription rates does not necessarily imply an annual change in subscription rates.</p> <p>Council agreed to the proposed changes to membership rates but reiterated that it is crucial to get the right message across to members, such as a reminder of what their membership includes, and the benefits of membership, to avoid cancellations.</p> <p>The annual cap on the Club’s Endowment Fund has not been reviewed since 2016. It was proposed to increase the cap amount from the current level (£4000) to £5000 to maximise the number of research projects and survey work that the Club is able to support through the EF grants. Any unutilised funds could be carried over for one year only. Council agreed to the strict cap on carrying funds over.</p> <p>RK advised Council that £12k cash has been withdrawn from the portfolio due to operational bank account being low.</p> <p>The P&L account was discussed and March’s projection is currently -£20k. Council agreed that an annual budget would allow for more accurate budgeting in the future. There is also a long-term strategy to review the use of funds to avoid sitting on a lot of cash.</p>	<p>(Student, Junior and Unwaged) to become digital only.</p> <p>WH to check administrative impact on Kathryn will be manageable before changes implemented.</p> <p>RK to organise an announcement for June SB</p>
<p>6 Management Committee report</p>	<p>LC spoke to the draft minutes of the Committee’s meeting in February. The Committee agreed that implementation of a new membership management system (CRM) would be a major step forward for the Club and would significantly improve efficiencies. Salaries had been reviewed and all staff were given a 4.8% pay rise, in line with inflation, which was gratefully received. It was agreed that salaries would be reviewed annually as it may not always be possible to increase salaries year on year.</p> <p>[There was no Birding & Science Committee (BSC) update as BSC had not met since the last Council meeting. The next meeting is on 1st April, so the next update to Council will be on 12 June.]</p>	<p>Draft minutes to remove line about President recommendation as this had not yet been discussed by Council at the time of the meeting.</p>

<p>7 Conferences and events</p>	<p>Annual conference – CW explained that there has not been much progress yet owing to preparation for the spring conference taking precedence. However, CW reported that she had relayed to the Scottish Raptor Monitoring Scheme (SRMS) Council’s support for the idea of a raptor theme for this year’s event, to include a special SRMS reception on the Friday afternoon. SOC’s SRMS rep., Mike Thornton, accepted the invitation to join the conference organising group and CW extended this invitation to any Council members who wished to join the group (currently Ruth, Chris, Mike, Will, Nina and Wendy).</p> <p>Scottish Birdwatchers’ Conference – RSC explained that the emergence of the Omicron variant questioned whether to keep a F2F conference but a poll suggested most members preferred to proceed with a F2F meeting. To minimise risk, attendees will be requested to take a LFT and wear masks throughout, there is a limit on 150 people which is 30% of the capacity of the room. There are ~135 people attending to date but we are continuing to accept bookings until the end of the week. The cost was reduced to £26pp due to no catering at lunch time. Many delegates provided donations and so all costs should be covered. Sunday walks will be going ahead (coastal walk and offshore boat trip from Findhorn). Council thanked the local branch (Moray Bird Club), and SOC and BTO Scotland staff for their hard work in organising this long-awaited conference.</p> <p>ZB relayed Jane Allison’s report to Council on SOC Youth Events:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - SOC/BTO Scotland Scottish Bird Camp (10-16yrs, priority being given to residents in Scotland/SOC members) - confirmed for Fri 3 – Sun 5 June 2022 at Alison Cargill House, Whittinghame. Due to COVID-19, the venue's capacity is restricted to 15 individuals (12 young person/3 leader places). The other leaders/volunteers will need to be accommodated offsite. The Club has paid a £200 deposit to secure the venue (should COVID require us to cancel, we'll be fully refunded). Activities confirmed include Lothian Ringing Group bird ringing demonstration, Bass Rock Boat Trip with Blue Wild, and nest-finding session. Programme will also include quiet and social time, mindfulness and art-related sessions. Applications will be open from next week (Jane Allison is currently finalising the website promotion and application form). RB mentioned that she would like to join the camp to meet the young birders. - Branches Workshop: Save the Date invite finalised – Jane will be emailing this out to invitees- it includes a poll to determine preference for F2F vs online event. Programme near complete. Hotel has changed hands but the booking won't be affected. - Young Birders Training Course (under 30s): This was planned to take place in July 2022 at the Isle of May. However, given uncertainties around COVID during the time of planning, the course will not be going ahead this year. There is also concern regarding the number of participants (six) and whether to change the format of the course, given limited resources. Council agreed that the quality of the training is better with smaller numbers, and suggested continuing with current format. LC added that she has previously discussed the situation with YBTC with Jane and 	<p>WH to convene meeting with organising group.</p> <p>Future Council topic to include networking with other branches.</p>
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	<p>wanted to reassure Council that the course wasn't being scrapped, merely its shape and form reviewed.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - SOC/BTO Scotland Youth Events programme (under 30s): This has been progressing well and a new programme is starting in April. Feedback has been consistently very good. Facebook advertising was used to promote the last few events which has had a (positive) impact on bookings so the investment has been worthwhile (£40 per FB boost, split between SOC & BTO Scotland). <p>Council discussed why Junior membership was so low (11 subscribers) despite all of these events. CW explained that engagement with young people is still in the early phases and we are still developing relationships through F2F or online courses. Jane Allison is currently asking for membership number during registration but will change to a yes/no tick box option simply to find out if people are members. In addition, there are currently 90 people on the Youth Events mailing list so building up that list adds scope for a rise in junior membership.</p> <p>The Chair also mentioned that a bird recording mentoring scheme in Lothian (in conjunction with SOC Lothian Winter Atlas fieldwork) has been piloted this winter (led by Andrew Matthews and Mike Thornton) and has had very positive feedback to date.</p>	<p>JW to seek update for Council on Lothian mentoring scheme.</p>
8	<p>Membership report</p> <p>A membership trends report was presented, which showed a steady increase in membership since 2018 (with the exception of 2021). Current membership stands at 3524.</p> <p>ZB queried the high number of cancelled members relative to new members from 1 Mar 2017 – 28 Feb 2018 (which was the last year subscriptions went up) and suggested additional analyses be done to understand the numbers in more detail.</p>	<p>More analysis required to understand membership figures and the reasons for cancellations year on year.</p>
9	<p>Other matters arising</p> <p>The action to reconvene the strategy group didn't happen (impossible to find a date). The Chair to liaise with RB/CW/Hon Sec. CW suggested arranging a meeting before the branches workshop weekend.</p> <p>There is potentially a BTO Annual Conference/ SOC Council meeting clash on the 4th December. It was confirmed that Council should seek to hold one F2F meeting/year, perhaps aiming for the September meeting.</p>	<p>JW/RB to reconvene Strategy Group</p> <p>WH to explore moving December Council meeting one week earlier and to decide which of the four Council meetings in the year should be F2F.</p>
10	<p>AOCB</p> <p>ZB mentioned that the Clyde Bird Report has been published but noted that there is a poor level of recordings on the Clyde. A Facebook poll suggested that there is a feeling of "elitism" with new birders having records rejected etc. There was also a question about data sharing and how data are currently being used. The Chair emphasised that Mark Lewis is</p>	<p>B&S Committee to discuss a data management training course for local bird recorders. An</p>

	<p>already making progress on this, and these topics will be central to the planned Local Bird Recorders (LBR) workshop later in 2022.</p> <p>NS raised a concern from the Borders local recorder about the difficulties processing records from multiple platforms (i.e., BirdTrack & eBird), and suggested that recorders use a single platform. There was discussion around discouraging the use of eBird. Council felt it was not an appropriate position for SOC to take to seek to discourage use of eBird, but that as a BirdTrack partner, we should continue to encourage the use of BirdTrack, and that we have a role to help share best practice across the LBR community to help LBRs manage flow of records form multiple platforms. This will be a focus of the planned LBR workshop later in 2022. WC suggested that the lack of expertise of local recorders in being able to download and merge datasets from multiple platforms can be resolved through a training course on use of scripts for managing big datasets. WC was given approval to approach Alison Johnston (previously at Cornell) to explore if she may be able to assist on this issue and put her in touch with Mark Lewis if appropriate. The Chair suggested this may be a topic for consideration by Strategy Group but is ultimately for the B&S Committee to lead on.</p>	<p>opportunity for discussion at the local recorders meeting?</p> <p>WC to approach Alison Johnston.</p>
11	<p>Date of next Council meeting</p> <p>12th June 2022</p>	<p>JW/DL/RB/WH to meet prior to June Council meeting</p>
12	<p>Additional papers</p> <p>The Chair directed Council to the minutes of the Library Committee and SOC Endowment Fund Awards 2022 papers. which had been circulated to Council for information.</p>	